



## COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA

Andrew K. Block, Jr.  
Director

### Department of Juvenile Justice

#### MEMORANDUM

**TO:** The Honorable Christopher K. Peace, Chair  
Amy M. Atkinson, Executive Director  
The Virginia Commission on Youth

**FROM:** Andrew K. Block, Jr. *AKB, Jr.*

**DATE:** November 18, 2014

**RE:** Model Social History Report and Guidelines for Completion

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Stemming from the recommendations of the Virginia Commission on Youth's 2013 study on Mental Health Assessments for Juvenile Offenders, the 2014 General Assembly enacted HB 183 and SB 128 relating to the juvenile and domestic relations district courts' consideration of social history reports prior to commitment of a juvenile to the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ). The bills require a juvenile judge to review and to take into consideration the information provided in a social history report prior to committing a juvenile to DJJ except where the attorney for the Commonwealth, the attorney for the juvenile, and the juvenile agree to waive this requirement. To provide for more uniform and effective dispositional planning, the bills required DJJ to develop a model social history report and guidelines for the use of the model to be used by all court services units (CSUs) across the Commonwealth. It was suggested the guidelines include instructions on obtaining individualized educational program assessments and incorporate information addressing the juvenile's exposure to trauma.<sup>1</sup> The legislation also required DJJ to "report its progress to the Virginia Commission on Youth prior to the 2015 Regular Session of the General Assembly." I am writing this memorandum to update you on DJJ's progress.

In March of this year, when it was evident that the bills were going to pass, DJJ's CSU Procedures Committee (Committee) began discussing what the template should look like and developing an implementation plan for the model social history reports. The Committee reviewed the statutory and regulatory requirements for social history reports to ensure the template complied with these requirements. Next, high quality samples of social history reports from CSUs across the Commonwealth were reviewed and a template was drafted. The template

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<sup>1</sup> The bills, [HB 183](#) and [SB 128](#), have an effective date of October 1, 2014. The bills' enactment clause states that "the model and guidelines may include instructions on obtaining individualized education program assessments and incorporating information about exposure of the juvenile to trauma."

continued to be modified and revised based on feedback from DJJ's Executive Team, the CSU Directors' Association, and DJJ's Judicial Liaison Committee, which includes nine judges and a representative of the Office of the Executive Secretary of the Supreme Court of Virginia.

In response to the directives from the Virginia Commission on Youth and the General Assembly, DJJ included in the new social history template a specific trauma screening tool, the Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) trauma screening tool, as well as more specific guidance and reporting on the appropriateness of a juvenile's educational services

Once the model was finalized, the Committee drafted procedures and a guidance document to guide implementation. The guidance document provides details regarding what types of information should be included in each category of the template along with providing sample language for CSU staff to reference. Training on the model social history report and on administering the ACE trauma screen was conducted with all CSUs during the month of September. DJJ's own treatment and community program staff provided this training. Additionally, DJJ staff were encouraged to attend one of the ten Trauma & Youth: Understanding the Impact of Trauma and Shared Learning Collaborative trainings sessions held by the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS). All told, more than 575 CSU staff were trained internally and 80 DJJ employees including both community and juvenile correctional staff have attended the two DCJS trauma training trainings that were held in September. We anticipate that many more DJJ employees will attend the eight additional training sessions.

As of October 1, 2014, all CSUs are required to use the new template for any social history ordered on or after October 1 and the Reception and Diagnostic Center has been instructed not to accept, as part of the commitment packet, any social history that does not conform to the new template in these cases. The new model provides juvenile court judges, attorneys for the Commonwealth, and defense attorneys across the Commonwealth, with a more effective and uniform tool to assist in informed decision making at disposition. In addition to being more readable the new model requires more comprehensive information in all cases, including the results of an objective trauma screening, a clearer picture of the juvenile's educational status, and the identification of possible funding sources for services.

If you have questions please do not hesitate to contact me. I look forward to attending the December 2, 2014, Virginia Commission on Youth meeting to provide you with a status report on how the model social history report has been received by our juvenile justice partners. Thank you for your time and consideration.